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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the sources or speakers of the "new religions" as contemporary rhetorical-communicative movements and discusses their public speaking and communicative behavior. Specifically, the paper focuses on the relationship between spirituality and communication within the teachings of the leaders who nurture these new religions. Using research questions proposed by Allan Eister, the paper presents interpretations of human existence, describes how symbol-systems are employed, analyzes the eclectic and syncretistic elements within these movements, describes the charismatic qualities attributed to the teachers, and reports the particular practices that bind the participants within these distinctive movements. The paper examines three Eastern swamis (Vivekananda, Paramananda, and Yogananda). The paper also considers Western religious scholars, principally Robert Ellsworth, an academic who encouraged cross-cultural religious studies in U.S. universities. The paper argues that the convergence of Eastern and Western religions constitutes an epoch-making event and should prompt thoughtful dialogue, expecially in the academy. (One hundred three endnotes are included.) (TD)

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Daniel Ross Chandler

THE "NEW" RELIGIONS AS RHETORICAL MOVEMENTS

Background

Travellers venturing across the earth see diverse religious manifestations and expressiona. Returning from an around-the-world journey, Chicago clergyman Bradley remembered white-robed pilgrims drinking from the Ganges, hungry beggars pwowling Benares, and a Chinese mother sailing through Hong Kong Harbor. The popular preacher concluded that the final problem facing humanity is preserving the dignity of human personality and creating oneness among mankind.[1] M.I.T. professor Smith recalled Yemenite Jews worshipping in a Jersaleum synagogue, toursits visiting Istanbul's Blue Mosque, followers of Ramakrishna meditating beside the Ganges, and Zen monks plumbing the Buddha-nature. Smith wondered whether the different voices within this strange fellowship sounded like bedlam or blended harmoniously, described authentic religion as the clearest opening through which the inexhaustible cosmic energies enrich human existence, and pondered how religion challenges individuals with the great adventure of transversing the heights of the human spirit.[2] Smith observed that a religious pioneer who scales this frontier becomes a world redeemer.

In the United States during the turbulent nineteen-sixties and -seventies, strange movements emerged that scholars called "the new religions." From Golden Gate Park in San Francisco to Greenwich Village in New York City, youth who constituted a colorful counterculture dawned minstrel garb, jester clothes, Indian blankets, and safrin Zen robes. Chanting ancient Hindu sūtras and Buddhist mantras and wearing Adamic hair with Indian headbands and vivid love-beads, the "hippies" dramatized a qualitative experience discovered through expanded consciousness, transcendental

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meditation, and psychedelic experimentation. Restless within twentieth-century technological civilization, wandering "hippies" and playful flower-children embraced the traditions of contemplative Orientals, studied ancient writings from Tibetan Lamaists, and celebrated the electrical vibrations from Eastern musicians. Harper wrote:

> A group of young people, wearing long pieces of yellow cloth thrown around one shoulder, chanting "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Hare" to the accompaniment of drum-beat on a street in Boston; a dozen students on a university campus in Atlanta, sitting on the floor before a large picture of a man, chanting "Meher Baba ki jai"; five hundred people attending a Spiritual Unity of Nations Seminar in Detroit; a Spiritual Master holding an audience spellbound in Washington, D.C.; a large Vedanta publishing house in Hollywood - these are only a few of the evidences that "Hunduism has invaded America," 3

Seeking meaning, freedom, and creativity through a drug-induced ecstasy that some observers compared to a super-Eucharistic psychedelic ritural or a medieval monk's mystical musings, bearded, sandal-wearing hippies savored epistemic experiences that yielded alternative life-styles, fresh value-systems, and different world-views. Challenging the dominating scientific orientation and objective reasoning, these innovative celebrants embraced a visionary experience that Roszak described:

> In contrast, the beauty of the magical vision is the beauty of the deeply sensed, sacramental presence. The perception is not one of order, but of power. Such experience yields no sense of accomplished and rounded-off knowledge, but, on the contrary, it may begin and end in an overwhelming sense of mystery. We are awed, not informed. 4

Confronting a sophisticated scientific tencnocracy, these hippies sensed that humans become estranged from essential sources-of-meaning when non-rational experiences such as wonder, mystery, and awe are suppressed within a scientifically-disciplined culture. Decrying the cultural sterility plaguing suburbia and the rampant anomie that haunts metropolis, these dissidents claimed that rootlessness grows when persons are severed from authentic selfhood and personal identity and that

strangement flourishes when individuals feel themselvers severed within themselves and from meaningful interpersonal relationships. Celebrating expanded consciousness, higher reason, non-intellectual experience, creative human liberation, compassionate community, and enriched living, the counterculture nurtured face-to-face relationships, renounced traditionally-structured roles within nuclear famalies, resisted confinement within tightly-structured employment systems. Emphasizing not simply how humans know but how persons should live, these hippies expressed their conviction that human sociability through expanded awareness and communal sharing should supersede humanity's technological development. This growing conviction was given a creative emotional expression which Reich called a veritable "greening of America."[5]

Roszak remarked:

> Yet it was a generation of mind-blown hippies and flower children, walking through the world as if with eyes on some other reality, who opened the Aquarian frontier and made it a visible social fact, a live option for the millions....Playfully casting off their middle-class, suburban identities, they became Zen Buddhists, American Indians, Hindu sadhakas, witches and warlocks, gypsies of the open road, street freaks (and, along other lines, people's warriors and enemies of the state). 6

As unusual ideas about "karma" and "reincarnation" infiltrated popular discussion, different philosophical concepts appeared with which Eastern religion was communicated. Psychical phenomenona was pondered as prophetic promptings; herbal and homeopathic medicine was studied as a remedy respecting an integrative intelligence working within physical bodies and with organic nature. Astrology was described as a segment withinin systematic teachings communicated through myth that provided what Needleman called "the language of a purified emotional perception that had as its object the great unitary intentions of the cosmos" and that imparted insight about "the context of man's divine mission of self-perfection through the service of God."[7]

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Seeking simple styles, some flower-children prefered natural food, practiced organic farming, pursued crafts such as pottery and weaving, and established communes during a countercultural revolution that Prebish pondered:

> In an age of mass media, data input systems, and intensified social fluidity, America flexes its collective muscles in the search for human completeness amidst Theodore Roszak's projected "Wasteland," and an overwhelming (and perhaps alarming) variety of alternatives appear in the social, cultural, and religious spheres: alternative marriage, styles to combat the alarming (and constantly rising) divorce rate, electronic music and computerized art forms to tantalize the avant-garde,and esoteric cults promoted by self-styled gurus of the "pop" scene. 8

Speaking in 1976, Harvard professor Cox wondered whether persons had permitted Christianity and Judaism to become so identified with accumulation, profit, and success that the emergence of Eastern spirituality was required to remind contemporary individuals than an alternative life-style "is not built on accumulating profit, prosperity, success, and degrees, but has at its core a certain kind of simplicity and plainness of living."[9]

Perspective

This essay describes the sources or speakers of the "new religions" as contemporary rhetorical-communicative movements and discusses their public speaking and communicative behavior. Specifically the focus emphasizes the relationship between spirituality and communication within the teachings of the leaders who nurture these new religions. Using the research questions proposed by Eister, this study indicates the interpretations of human existence, describes how symbol-systems are employed, analyzes the eclectic and syncretistic elements within these movements, describes the charismatic qualities attributed to the teachers, and reports the particular practices that bind the participants within these distinctive movements.[10]

Turner described new religious movements as "those which arise in the interaction of a primal society with another society where there is a great disparity of

power or sophistication."[11] According to Wilson, the distinctive characteristics of new religious movements are exotic provenance, new cultural life-style, a level of engagement markedly different from that of traditional church Christianity, charismatic leadership, a following predominately young and drawn in disproportionate measure from the better-educated and middle class sections of society, social conspiciety, international operation, and emergence within the last decade and a half.[12] Ellwood confined the term to groups germinated during the yeasty spiritual ferment of the sixties, described that decade as a watershed in American life, and explained that non-normative religion during the sixties gained a special quality from an association with the youth culture or counterculture.[13] Ellwood evoked remembrances that "young people raised in the white-picket-fence suburbs of the Eisenhower era were doing strange things: going Eastern, being swept away by totalistic groups that amounted to surrogate families, rejecting science and patriotism to create a chasmic 'generation gap'."[14] This scholar encouraged cross-cultural studies analyzing new religious movements to illumine contemporary spiritual life in the United States.

Resources

An extensive literature describing the new religions indicates that examining these contemporary movements almost inevitably entails international intercultural communication and information-infusion nurturing an emerging universal humanistic religion.

Based upon the 1930 Hibbert Lectures presented at Manchester College, Oxford, Tagore's The Religion of Man contains the epistemic claim that through yoga persons transcend their humanity and discover themselves conscious of unity with Parabrahman.

The world-renown Indian poet-artist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature described himself as neither a scholar nor a philosopher and attested that "my religion is a poet's religion, and neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian."[15] In lectures delivered during 1936-1938 and published subsequently as Eastern Religions and Western Thought, the brilliant Indian philosopher-statesman Radhakrishnan realized that the most revolutionary changes in human history happened during the preceding fifty years; for the first time, inhabitants of the earth became a single interdependent whole and gained awareness of that unity.[16] Radhakrishnan stated that the great periods in human history are marked by widespread access of spirituality derived from fusing national cultures with foreign influences; the writer said that the wisdom and spirit of the previous forms penetrait the successors and inspire the gradual evolution of the purpose of history. Believing that human destiny depends upon rapidly assimilating the qualities associated with mystic Eastern religions, he envisioned an emerging philosophy combining the finest European humanism with Asian religion, endowed with greater spiritual and ethical power; he foresaw a new humanism emphasizing mystical experience and already embraced by the majority of contemporary intellectuals. When Northrop's pioneering and perceptive The Meeting of East and West appeared in 1924, the author was among the earliest Americans who understood and appreciated the importance of Eastern culture for Western civilization and to comprehend and communicate the enormous potential exerted by Buddhism, meditation, martial arts, yoga, and Oriental art.[17] Among the first "comprehensive" historical surveys describing American religious experience that mentioned non-traditional groups was Ahlstrom's A Religious History of the American People. Appearing in 1972, the Yale

historian's book described the deflection from Western religious traditions as a major sign of the time, that marked a significant shift in scholarship by acknowledging religions outside the Judeao-Christian movements, traced a syncretic tendency to incorporate all historical religions within a single expression, and observed the trend among Western religions to relate themselves positively with Eastern religions. Ahlstrom said that American interest in Oriental wisdon increased when Transcendentalism appeared; Emerson and Thoreau were among the most prominent prophets.[18]

Writing in 1977, Cox chronicled an increasing interest among Americans in Eastern spirituality that he described as unprecedented in scope and intensity, unconfined to "intellectuals," and stressing pragmatic practices rather than theological doctrines. He questioned whether the Eastern religion emerging during the nineteen-seventies succeeded the psychedelic upsurge that developed a decade earlier, and Cox was intrigued with "the frequent assertion by people who had taken psychedelic drugs that their drug experience sharply undercut the credibility of any form of 'Western' faith-vision and made some sort of 'Eastern' religious world view the only credible one."[19] The Harvard professor explained that introducing Oriental spirituality into America was difficult because consumer culture and psychological individualism constitutes a distorting cultural barrier; the resultant Western prismatic refraction of Eastern spirituality comprises a completely different pattern that exerts neither the impact from a genuine alternative vision nor the critical potential implicit in biblical faith, but supporting the isolated, comeptitive Western ego which Eastern spirituality should undermine. Cox claimed that American's willingness to change their common life must precede their capacity to perceive and comprehend Eastern teachings correctly; that the Western spiritual crisis will not be solved with religious importations but through returning to primal spiritual roots; and that eventually Oriental spiritual disciplines will

create a profound contribution to Western civilization.[20] Writing in 1988, Cox indicated that contemporary individuals have an opportunity for experiencing a larger ecumenism than previous generations, although he criticized the artificiality and superficiality with which American consumers "approach Eastern religious movements like capricious shoppers pushing their carts from one aisle to another, unable to slack their spiritual gluttony."[21] Cox emphasized the possibilities for interreligious dialogue:

> Not only do we live on a spiritually multiplex globe, but nearly every continent, nation, and city is itself increasingly pluralistic. As a result of nineteenth-century Christian missionary activity,worldwide migration patterns, and the spread of Asian religious practices in the West, previous "spheres of influence" arrangements no longer work. Everyone is now everywhere. There are native-born Presbyterians in Cambodia; third-generation Buddhists in the United States; and Hindu temples in the Caribbean. 22

Examining the emerging Western religious movements, Cox concluded that their popularity attests a pattern of dislocation and alienation among some affluent young Americans whom he described as "victims of apainful overload of contradictions between the stated Christian and universalist value system of society, on the one hand, and its actual capitalist utilitarian modus operande, on the other."[23] Cox predicted that during the future, the perennial problems of human meaning and personal responsibility will be discussed in the categories derived from the great religious traditions; that the most significant questions must be decided using premises which have no empirical evidence; and that these persistent perplexities will guide sincere seekers ultimately to those strata of human reality where person's primal apprehensions and aspirations are experienced in myth and symbols that remain the exclusive sources of wisdom.

Among the earliest and finest scholars who considered unconventional spitituality in the United States as one uniquely vital and coherent tradition, USC professor Ellwood bequeathed an enormous contribution to scholarly analyses on new religions.

In Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America Ellwood distinguished between "emissary" or "ethical" prophets and "exemplary" prophets when he explained that the former is an envoy communicating a burning message for salvation or reform while the latter contains a divine fullness having searched for the Platonic sources. Hence different communicative strategies are employed for religions that are "grounded in cosmic wonder and communicated by the exemplary personalities, and those grounded in revelation within history and emissary communication."[24] The author advised that a distinctively different spirituality arises in contemporary America:

> The new spiritual man is more like the kind of person we have heretofore associated with the East - or with cultists. He presumes without question that God or spiritual reality, if it is to be found, is to be found within through expanded states of consciousness which penetrate like searchlights toward the deep floor of being. Interior exploration is his main concern. He is suspicious of words and verbal communication. He is disenchanted with sermons, lectures, and disquisitions, but is highly sensitive to nonverbal communication and the lessons of meditation....The new spiritual man's social concern is for an organic, ecological harmony of humankind with the cosmos in subtle interaction. 25

Ellwood indicated that an American subculture has created religious expressions that do not merely reproduce or export the great non-Western religions, that these emerging movements are not normatively Judaeo-Christian, and that these groups are concerned with "ultimate transformation" and express themselves through myths, doctrines, worship, and social structures. Usually the new religious movement has a single leader who expresses a rearranged symbol-system and style through personality, addresses the deepest latent intentions within the listeners, and perceives possible patterns that appropriate integrated value within everything having independent value by reinterpreting a shattered cosmos. In Alternative Altars; Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America Ellwood maintained that occult, mystical, and Eastern movements in America represent a frequently unseen but continuously dynamic segment within American religious experience and history. He said:

> If emergent religion is the alternative to which those who turn away from established religion of the temple have recourse, their journeys are individual excursions. If the emergent religious tradition has certain unifying themes, and a hidden history which shows continuities among its many manifestations past and present, for each voyager the journey is unique and solitary because it enacts a personal subjective quest. 26

New England Transcendentalism, Ellwood explained, has done the most to legitimate these comprehensive alternative spiritualities and present paradigms for their domestication.[27] In an outstanding anthology containing primary sources, Eastern Spirituality in America: Selected Writings, the editor documented how Eastern spirituality exercises an important influence upon American culture and provides valuable religious alternatives. Diffusion of Eastern religion seems facilitated by three Western mindsets: romanticism inducing a pantheistic glow, the Western occult tradition with Hellenistic foundations, and empirical science that resists arbitrary authority. Among the characteristics of Eastern religions in the United States are their fairly fluid structure centered upon a charismatic personality, intellectual expression of a pantheistic universalism emphasizing the divine within, intensity of experience grounded in practice and philosophy, and direct participatory experience in worship. Ellwood said that the charismatic leader is

> (a) the founder or living teacher of the group, (b) recipient of a special call or initiation upon which the group is based, (c) uniquely qualified to teach or impart a special technique for spiritual experience, such as a method of meditation, chanting, or devotion, (d) uniquely entitled to call and empower disciples to which this authority may be passed, and (e) the object of a special devotion, in line with the Eastern tendency to blend freely the sacred and the teacher of the sacred, so that the charismatic teacher, or after death his portrait or image and relics, is offered quasi-divine honors. 28

Ellwood identified three specific periods within the historical institutionalization of Eastern religion in America for occidentals: a period of verbal and intellectual emphasis based upon reading books and hearing lectures, a period characterized by the charismatic personality or living teacher, and a period of disassociation with

conventional religion. Ellwood's informative introduction in Choquette's New Religious Movements in the United States and Canada presents nine categories within which new movements might be classified.[29]

Although Harper stated that the new religions that venerate Hindu gods and saints were introduced in the United States by Swami Vivekananda and Swami Yogananda,[30] his Gurus, Swamis, and Avataras contains biographical sketches of eight other persons.

SFSU professor Needleman described the new religions as a revolution striking the established Western institutions, a spiritual phenomenon promising to transform everything Westerners have thought about God and human possibility, and a powerful influence compelling Western consciousness to examine itself in a manner unprecedented since the Scientific Revolution.[31] Needleman suggests that perhaps the entire Western conception of religion will be changed by an inwardness encouraged by Eastern spirituality, and the San Francisco scholar stated that "what today is generally accepted as Judaeo-Christian doctrine may bear little or no resemblance to the mystical, practical core of our traditions wherein they often exhibit an outstanding similarity to the religions of the East."[32] The author asserts that the new religions do not endanger the established religious institutions, unless the reassessment of humanity's inward potential comprises a threat. Needleman concluded that comprehending Eastern spirituality conveys the convictions that a central characteristic of Western religion is a diminishing underestimation of human intelligence, that intellectual inquiry becomes seriously inept without essential disciplime provided spiritual techniques, and that Westerners must change their concept of reality by accepting their inherent attunement with the magical and abandoning the myth about objective consciousness. Needleman maintained that the new religions secure significance and vitality from the arrival in America of

"certain unusual men from the East who have brought with them practical teachings and forms of organization, each of which in its own way is not only new to the West, but new to the world."[33] The author observed:

> Just as the Torah had its "fence" and just as Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables, the founders of these movements, each in his own way, attempts to direct their communications to the more intuitive side of man, what we shall later speak of as "the intelligence of the heart."
>
> The new teachings thus present themselves in ways that resist conceptual formulation. One obvious reason for this is their intense emphasis on practice and method, and their mistrust of the isolated intellect. 34

In a substantive anthology that Needleman and Baker edited, Capps contended that the significance and power exerted by the new religions will be missed until new and adequate research methodologies are developed; he professed that new religion cannot emerge until ways are discovered for discussing these movements and that the essential methodological transformation necessitates challenging the Enlightenment doctrine that symbols, beliefs, and ceremonies can be comprehended by dissecting these constructs. Capps cautioned:

> Because new religion is in the process of formulation, it cannot be penetrated by methodologies trained upon the permanent and static. If permanence is regarded as being normative, the sense of new religion's protean, dynamic character will be missed. 35

Roszak renounced studying religion "like some quaint fossil whose structure and uncertain structure are now at last to receive expert analysis" from "specialists who can dissect their subject matter from every imaginable angle" and who "rush forward to crucify it with questionnaires."[36] Stone recommended developing an interdisciplinary "psychology of knowledge" supplementing the well-established "philosophy of science" and "sociology of knowledge."[37] Hargrove proposed placing the new religions along a continuum ranging from "integrative" religion characterized by strong organization specific myths and rituals, and definite behavorial

expectations, to "transformative" religion that emphasizes interpersonal relationships, openness in formulating myths and rituals, and individual freedom that accommodates idiosyncracies and interpretations.[38] Ellwood admonished researchers that examining new religious movements seriously requires approaching them as symbol-systems:

> Symbols are the core of religion; their ability to carry at once meanings on many levels and even meanings in paradoxical relation to each other is one with religion's sense of mystery and transcendence, and its simultaneous expression in several media. 39

Ellwood explained that sacred symbols always have a past, that they are discovered but not invented; symbols can change meaning markedly and play innumerable roles; but they are slowly born and seldom die. Vividly Ellwood described new religion:

> An emergent religion, then, is one which appears suddenly and unexpectedly, in a light which makes it stand out from the sea of established religion, like a new volcanic island or a rock revealed by an unusually low tide, and which, though it may be a result of an understandable process and even something which in a sense was there all along, gives an appearance of novelty and contrasts strikingly with the surrounding spiritual milieu. 40

Although Baker recognized a crucial difference in orientation between Eastern and Western religion without elaborating extensively upon these epistemological distinctions, and although these differences are critical for researchers developing adequate research methodologies, he wrote nevertheless:

> Western man's knowledge of history is the litmus paper that shows his contact with Cosmic Intelligence. Concomitantly, Western science has required a dualistic frame of reference or epistemology, one in which a sharp division was to be made between the subject and the object of knowledge, between the Self that knows and the Not-Self that is known. In contrast, Eastern man has taken his capacity for personal Enlightenment as the primary evidence of his capacity to be moved by the same Spirit of Truth. For this reason, the great traditions of Asia have tended to be socio-psychologically oriented and pantheistic in their spiritual outlooks. Eastern science has required only a monistic epistemology, for the principles that govern the object of empirical investigation are to be discovered in the consciousness of the researcher. 41

Predicated predominately upon Enlightenment presuppositions, contemporary research methodologies for studying the new religions appear inappropriate.

While these scholars in Religious Studies acknowledged these inadequacies, scholars in Speech Communicated constructed innovative methodologies for analyzing contemporary rhetorical-communicative movements.[42] Stewart, Smith, and Denton observed that periodic social movements have provided the impetus for nearly all important socio-political change; that a social movement might be described as an uninstitutionalized collectively sufficiently extensive in scope that proposes or opposes persuasively a program for social change and is encountered by an established order; and that public speakers are an important form of social movement persuasion although they are neither the most prevalent nor necessarily the most effective. Social movements, these scholars recognized, may change over a period of time and contain both radical and moderate elements, appearing "to be strange mixtures of vagueness and precision, to borrow from old systems while espousing the new, to be both flexible and inflexible, to be static and ever-changing, and to be consistent and contradictory."[43]

Some scholars evaluate new religious movements and present predictions about their survival. In Zaretsky and Leone's Religious Movements in Contemporary America Wilson emphasized that serious study of American religion that neglects marginal movements is fundamentally flawed.[44] Eister recognized that

> anything which disturbs or challenges not merely belief systems but the fundamental elements or units of the framework in which belief-systems are formed - in which "meanings" are sought or orientations communicated - must be expected to have consequences of the most profound order, including among many others the stimulation or even provocation of cult interest, cult movements, and cult activity. 45

Realizing that the entire system of cultural patterns and of institutions for

creating and maintaining discourse have encountered startling challenges and profoundly dislocative discoveries, Eister commends that scholars should seek the structural sources of dislocation within communicative and orientational institutions.[46] In Glock and Bellah's The New Religious Consciousness Wuthnow remarked that the new religious movements clearly comprise a noteworthy force in American religion, that a sizeable minority within the United States are aware and attracted, that countercultural groups "appear to be part of a larger shift away from traditional religious commitments and toward some new, yet undefined, mode of religious expression," and that these groups "are not simply a reflection of religious unrest, however, but are part of a broader wave of experimentation with countercultural life-styles and social arrangements."[47] Discovering four specific stages within American religious transformation between 1820 and 1860, Prichard explained that social and economic changes undermined established religion, new theological perspectives and religious practices emerged, numerous sects appeared, and the religious upheaval culminated in developing new religion that realigned religion and society.[48] In Bromley and Hammond's The Future of New Religious Movements Melton maintained that "the United States and the West are experiencing a large-scale movement of both people and religion from East to West, a movement with the potential to reshape the Western religious scene as significantly as nineteenth-century Christianity reshaped Africa and the Orient."[49] Menton said that the new religious groups have appeared in America for at least a century and a half, that they have grown steadily in size and influence, and that the prime resource for alternative religions is traditional Asian religion. Johnson speculated that no one predicted the changed climate that nurtured new religion, and no one

can predict with certainty their future.[50] Hammond speculated that two centuries of religious change in the United States have fostered increasing possibilities for individual choice among alternatives in a pluralistic society, that the new religious movements have provided an opportunity for a counterculture to germinate, that one consequence will be a more variegated culture, and that another likely consequence is the steady erosion of long-standing mainline denominations through legal decision-making.[51]

Some scholars analze the psychologically persuasive techniques of conversion, brainwashing, and deprogramming. Bromley, Hadden, and Hammond reported that societal hostility has been directed against new religious movements and scholars making efforts to study these movements, that converts enter these groups through various routes that cannot be understood until the concept of brainwashing becomes jettisoned, and that evidence does not support the conclusion that cult leaders exert hypnotic power.[52] In Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare Bromley and Shupe correct the misunderstanding that cults are mysterious, comparatively unknown, and comprehended correctly by their critics. In an outstanding independent assessment analyzing the criticism against unconventional religion, these authors claim that the contemporary controversy concerning cults constitutes "one of the bitterest and most significant religious conflicts of the twentieth century,"[53] that at stake might be not simply the cults' destiny but religious freedom and civil liberties, and that "the campaign against the new religions is better understood as the product of the anticultists' interests rather than as a civic crusade to save the rest of us from a dark, evil conspiracy."[54]

This extensive literature includes several synopses providing historical perspective,[55] encyclopedias containing biographical information,[56] and comprehensive bibliographies.[57]

Sources and Speakers

An enormously significant event happen, when the epoch-making World's Parliament of Religions convened amid the World's Columbian Exposition. Conceived as an international exposition commemorating Columbus' historic voyage, the Columbian Exposition was a spectacular attraction covering six hundred sixty-six acres and stretching nearly two miles along Lake Michigan in Jackson Park, Chicago. The elaborate exhibits were displayed in approximately one hundred fifty buildings that were designed by prominent architects and constructed from a composition resembling marble that prompted the visitors to designate the impressive encampment as White City. Among the numerous world-wide associations conducting congresses was the World's Parliament of Religions. Ernest explained that the World's Parliament of Religions that assembled in Chicago in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition represents an historic event symbolizing the approaching post-Christian era in the United States, partly because questions were raised concerning the nature of the different religions and about the essence of religion.[58] Needleman reported that the Vedanta Society, which was established by one of the distinguished participants, provided a foundation for the first Eastern religious tradition that took root on American soil and that through the American Vedantists Eastern spirituality was first taken seriously in the United States.[59]

In the spring, 1891. the General Committee on Religious Congresses of the World's Congress Auxiliary was appointed by President Charles C. Bonney, who was active in originating and developing world conventions. The committee chairman was John Henry Barrows, the pastor serving the First Presbyterian Church in Chicago. The committee commenced their ~~conviction~~ CONVERSATIONS with a conviction that nothing like a

World's Parliament of Religions had occurred. In June, 1891, a preleminary address circulated by the committee emphasized the creative and regulatory power exhibited by religion and requested cooperation from adherents representing the world's great religions. The committee suggested that a friendly conference composed of individuals holding strong personal convictions could be helpful in confirming religion's supreme truth and indicating the important insights that religion provides into contemporary problems. Interest in the proposed congress increased when the General Committee circulated their first report in February, 1892. A second report, containing a program for a seventeen-day conference, was published in March, 1893. The purpose was to assemble the leading representatives of the great world religions; to set forth for permanent record an accurate and authoritative account of the contemporary condition and future prospect of religion among the leading nations; to discern the significant distinctive truths contained within each religion; to indicate what and how many important truths the various religions hold in common; and to determine what insight each religion affords the other great world religions. The Parliament was planned to indicate the impregnable foundations of theism and the reason for human faith in immortality. The planners wanted to obtain from the leading scholars representing the world religions complete and accurate statements describing the effects exerted by religion upon literature, art, commerce, government, and domestic and social life. Through their deliberations the participants could determine the insight that religion provides into contemporary problems and questions about temperance, labor, education, and economic conditions. The Parliament was planned to strengthen the spirit of community among the representatives attending the congress and to draw the nations into a friendly fellowship to secure permanent world peace.

More than two years' planning and preparation preceded the World's Parliament of Religions conducted between September 11 and 28, 1893. Attracting about one hundred and fifty thoundand persons, the international congress exemplified an emerging world consciousness, prompted questions about the reunification of Christendom, encouraged reflection upon the relationship between Christianity and the non-Christian religions, emphasized natural religion, evoked enthusiastic cooperation in preparing and presenting the congress, and encouraged Christians and non-Christians to share a common fraternity. When the Parliament commenced, the Columbian Liberty Bell resounded with ten strokes, honoring the ten religions represented by the conferees assembled in the ivory-like houses that comprised the White City. Those who attended anticipated that the World's Parliament of Religions would exert a profound and ever-deepening impression upon religious thought, but the principal planners were not preoccupied with promoting a cosmic or universal religion.

Among the impressive personalities who attended the World's Parliament of Religions was the Swami Vivekananda, who delivered several ~~epoch-marking~~ SIGNIFICANT speeches describing a profound world religion. During his three-year journey through the United States and Europe, Vivekananda established the Vedanta movement and started the Ramakrishna Mission, that became an international association encouraging a cultural synthesis combining Eastern and Western religion and philosophy. Vivekananda's Chicago speeches constitute a intercultural communicative break-through in East-West dialogue, introduced a universal religious-philosophical perspective blending Eastern and Western thought, and created a powerful impression that was immediate and enduring. Vivekananda's mystical humanism, constituting the teachings and system

called Vedanta, asserts that every soul is potentially divine and attests that this inner divinity within humanity might become manifest through worship, meditation, unselfish work, and philosophical discrimination. Especially as expressed by Vivekananda's teacher Sri Ramakrishna, Vedanta affirms that truth is universal, that humanity and all existence is one, that the Godhead or Ultimate Reality is a unity, and that all expressions of world religion are legitimate methods with which seekers fathom truth.

Swami Vivekananda touched deeply the spirit of the American people, charmed audiences with his enchanting speeches, and exerted an indelible impression upon America's religious development. Unknown and uninvited, Swami Vivekananda was probably the first Hindu monk from India to visit the United States and present his spiritual message.[60] This wandering monk who embarked courageously on his journey to the new world, became lost in the streets of Chicago. Following his initial remarks before the World's Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda's audiences were thrilled with his inspiring message and welcomed him with thunderous and sustained applause. This Hindu speaker captured the attention of the American people and suddenly became famous around the world. Crowds gathered in the streets of Chicago to see picture-posters of Swami Vivekananda placed on billboards; leading newspapers and journals published his statements in dramatic captions; and lecture bureaus competed with one another to enlist him for lectures throughout the United States. Newspapers called Vivekananda the "cyclonic Hindu"; some observers referred to this apostle of Sri Ramakrishna as the "Brahmin monk" and the "paragon of Vedantist missionaries." After hearing Vivekananda, contemporary leaders of American thought were entranced with his radiant spiritual personality and his

powerful rhetorical persuasion. Intelligent observers instantaneously discerned the audacious impertinence of dispatching half-educated theological students to instruct erudite Hindu believers; Americans were blessed by hearing directly a sage of ~~the~~ *his* stature radiating purity, compassion, and tolerance. Never was Vedanta brought home to an English-speaking audience more forcibly.

The World's Parliament of Religions, conceived as an afterthought by the planners who prepared the Columbian Exposition, became an event of historic significance because this international congress provided a pulpit from which world-renown speakers such as Swami Vivekananda addressed the American audience. Vivekananda enthralled groups scattered across the continent with his physical strength and beauty, the grace and dignity of his bearing, his imposing appearance, and the splendid sound of his resonant voice. The message delivered so persuasively by this "warrior prophet of India" and "militant mystic" was the spiritual teaching that again and again rescued India during turbulent times of crisis and decline. Vivekananda emphasized that religious truth is one although sages designate that truth with various names. The central theme of Vedanta as articulated by Vivekananda is the harmony of religions that is realized through deepening spiritual consciousness. Although this ancient message was not distinctive in dialectical superiority or philosophical subtlety, this message was enlivened by the powerful personality of a dramatic speaker who shook the world with his intellectual and spiritual resources. News describing Swami Vivekananda's successful speaking tours across America eventually reached India, lost in the slumbers of inertia; his message evoked a spiritual renaissance characterized by a growing confidence and great intellectual-religious development. Before leaving Chicago, some observers predicted that Swami Vivekananda would become the "patriot prophet" of a new India.

Standing upon the platform and addressing the Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda represented the confluence of two great streams of thought, the two significant ideals that have influenced human culture. Nikhilananda noted:

> The vast audience before him represented exclusively the Occidental mind - young, alert, restless, inquisitive, tremendously honest, well disciplined, and at ease with the physical universe, but sceptical about the profundities of the supersensuous world and unwilling to accept spiritual truths without rational proof. And behind him lay the ancient world of India, with its diverse religious and philosophical discoveries, with its saints and prophets who investigated Reality through self-control and contemplation, unruffled by the passing events of the transitory life and absorbed in contemplation of the Eternal Verities. 61

In his initial address presented on opening day, September 11, 1893, Vivekananda expressed the appreciation of the world's most ancient order of monks, the mother of religions, and the Hindu people. Emphasizing religious tolerance and universal acceptence, he stated that he belonged to a religion that had taught the world these two virtues. In his religion, all religions are accepted as true.

> I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, a remnant which came to southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy Temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. 62

Vivekananda marvelled that the different paths that seekers pursue lead to God, as the diverse streams having their sources in varied places mingle in a common sea. He regretted that sectarianism, bigotry, and fanaticism have possessed the beautiful earth.

In his speech on Hinduism delivered on September 19, he cited Hinduism, Zoroasterianism, and Judaism as three pre-historic religions that remain in the

world. Mentioning the seeming diversity within Hinduism, he questioned the common center upon which the divergent radii converge and the basis upon which they rest. Vivekananda described the Vedas, the sacred scriptures cherished by the Hindu people, as the accumulated treasury of spiritual law discovered by different persons throughout human history; and the swami explained that the laws governing the spiritual world existed before their discovery and would remain although they became forgotten. The Vedas teach that creation is without beginning or end; and Vivekananda explained that "creation and creator are two lives, without beginning and without end, running parallel to each other, and God is power, an ever-active providence, under whose power systems after systems are being evolved out of chaos, - made to run for a time and again destroyed."[63] He carefully distinguished between his body and a spirit within the body, and he explained that the particular tendencies exhibited by a person are caused by previous actions and derived from previous lives. Vivekananda claimed that consciousness is the name of the surface of the mental ocean, and that within the depths are stored all experiences. However persons who discover these spiritual laws fathom precepts with which the ocean of memory is stirred. The swami indicated that "every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, and whose center is located in a body, and death means the change of this center from body to body."[64] Rather than sinful children expelled from a pre-historic paradise, persons are sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, divinities dwelling upon the earth, free and eternal spirits. The Almighty was described as the pure and formless one at the head of all lives, in and through every particle of matter and force. The Hindu people believe that Krishna was God incarnate upon earth, teaching that humans should

live in the world like lotus leaves, their hearts committed to God and using their hands for work. Hinduism does not excite struggles and attempts to believe dogmas and doctrines, but encourages awareness of being and becoming. A perfected soul enjoys infinite bliss, realizing God as the perfection of one's own nature and existence. To gain infinite individuality and become completely conscious, a person must realize that one is greater than a constantly changing physical body imprisoned within matter. The Hindu religion teaches that persons are potentially divine, and that idols, temples, and scriptures are simply supports used during spiritual childhood:

> To the Hindu[,] man is not traveling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. To him all the religions from the lowest fetichism to the highest absolutism means so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the Infinite, determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of these mark a stage of progress, and every soul is a child eagle soaring higher and higher; gathering more and more strength till it reaches the glorious sun. [65]

Appreciating the tolerance within Hinduism, Vivekananda remarked that every other religion specifies fixed doctrines and attempts to force the whole society to embrace that doctrine. "If the Hindu fanatic," Vivekananda observed, "burns himself on the pyre, he never lights the fire of inquisition; and even this cannot be laid at the door of religion any more than the burning of witches can be laid at the door of Christianity."[66] The same God inspires all religion; each religion is an effort to evolve a God from a mortal; apparent contradictions arise from the same truth becoming adapted to diverse circumstances within different nations. Vivekananda claimed that if there is to be a universal religion,

> it must be one which would hold no location in place or time, which would be infinite like the God it would preach, whose sun shines upon the followers of Krishna or Christ; saints or sinners alike; which would not be the Brahman or Buddhist, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development;

> which in its catholicity would embrace in its infinite arms and formulate a place for every human being, from the lowest groveling man who is scarcely removed in intellectuality from the brute, to the highest mind, towering almost above humanity, and who makes society stand in awe and doubt his human nature....
>
> May He who is the Brahma of the Hindus, the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea. 67

In his closing remarks on September 27, Vivekananda emphasized tolerance and universality. "Do I wish," he asked,

> that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid....
>
> But each must assimilate the others and yet preserve its individuality and grow according to its own law of growth.
>
> If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. 68

Reflecting upon the World's Parliament of Religions, Swami Ranganathananda summarized the enduring significance attributed to Swami Vivekananda's appearance. Swami Vivekananda was described as the one person standing as a golden link uniting India and the western world and promising to bind India and the rest of thw world with a common consciousness of the spiritual unity and solidarity of humanity. For the first time in Indian history of the past thousand years, India produced a great religious leader who guided India from her centuries-long isolation into the mainstream of international relationships. Holding the World's Parliament of Religions during the Columbian Exposition provided one of the greatest events in human history and marked an enduringly significant milestones in the development of international inter-religious fellowship.[69]

Another swami arriving in the United States was Suresh Chandra Guha Thakutra, Swami Paramananda, who was born at Banarupura, East Bengal, India, on February 5, 1885.[70]

Suresh's early life was spent in Calcutta and Dacca, where he was introduced to Sri Ramakrishna's writings and where he contacted the Ramakrishna Math located at Belur near Calcutta. In 1900 he ran away from hone; he joined the monestary; and in 1902 Vivekananda administered to him the vows of a sannyasin. Leading a renounced life, Suresh became Swami Paramanandȝ. The following four years were spent in Madras, where he envisioned undertaking a Western mission. An opportunity to visit the United States occurred during 1906, when Paramananda accompanied Swami Abhedananda to New York as his assistant at the Vedanta Center. When they arrived on December 23, 1906, they discovered that the growing Vedanta movement necessitated that swamis serve in different locations. Paramananda became acting head of the New York Vedanta Center in September, 1907; and he held that position until he moved to Boston during 1908.

While serving in New York, Paramananda wrote his first book, The Path of Devotion.[71] After visiting Boston, he moved there and opened the Boston Vedanta Center in January, 1909. In December, he founded a Vedanta Center in Washington, D.C. He divided his time during the next few years between Boston and Washington. Paramanandȝ travelled extensively throughout the United States, and in 1911 he commenced visits to Europe. Returing to the United States following his 1911 trip that included a journey to India, the swami expanded the Boston center, inaugurated his periodical Message of the East, and established his publishing house. In 1915 Paramanandȝ visited Los Angeles and discovered an immediate audience; beginning in 1917, he again divided his time between serving in Boston and Los Angeles. In 1923 he opened the Ananda Ashrama at La Cresenta, California; the swami founded the Ananda Ashrama in Cohasset, Massachusetts, during 1929. Until the swami's death during 1940, these three autonomous centers were connected intimately with the larger Vedanta movement in the United States.

A third "unusual man from the East" arriving in America was Mukunda Lal Ghosh, Swami Yogananda, who was born in Goraphpur, northeast India, on January 5, 1893. His early life was characterized by his pursuits for a formal education and his experiences of extrasensory phenomenona. While meditating upon a photograph of the prominent spiritual master Lahiri Mahasaya of Benaras, Mukunda saw a luminous blaze and recovered instantly from a frequently fatal disease. After attempting to run away from home, the boy was placed under Swami Kebalananda for spiritual education. The growing aspirant graduated from a Hindu high school, was introduced to Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri, entered a hermitage in Serampore, and continued his education at Scottish Church College in Calcutta. Evidently Sri Yukteswar taught the enthusiastic student carefully, and eventually the young disciple experienced expanded consciousness:

> Soul and mind instantly lost their physical bondage and streamed out like a fluid piercing light from my every pore. The flesh was as though dead; yet in my intense awareness I knew that never before had I been fully alive. My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body but embraced the circumambient atoms. People on distant streets seemed to be moving gently over my own remote periphery....
>
> The whole vicinity lay bare before me. My ordinary frontal vision was now changed to a vast sperical sight, simultaneously all-perceptive....
>
> An oceanic joy broke upon calm endless shores of my soul. The Spirit of God, I realized, is exhaustless Bliss; His body is countless tissues of light. A swelling glory within me began to envelop towns, continents, the earth, solar and stellar systems, tenuous nebulae, and floating universes. 72

After Mukunda received an Intermediate Arts diploma from Scottish Church College, he entered Serampore College, an affiliated branch of the University of Calcutta. In June, 1915, he was granted an A.B. degree from Calcutta University. Sri Yukteswar initiated the graduate into the Giri branch of the Swami Order; and he selected a new name, Yogananda.

In 1917 he founded a school, Yogoda Satsanga Brahmacharya Vidyalaya, at

Dihika. After his spiritual master encouraged Yogananda to follow a middle-path by combining the activity that characterizes the West with the spirituality that distinguishes the East, Yogananda comprehended that the East can learn much from the West about material development and the West can learn much from the East about spirituality.[73] Subsequently Yukteswar wrote a small book describing the underlying harmony between the Christian and Hindu scriptures, unobscured with sectarian differences and supported with passages from the sacred writings of both traditions, entitled The Holy Science.[74]

When Yogananda received an invitation to represent India during the International Congress of Religious Liberals gathered in Boston, the swami departed aboard The City of Sparta during August, 1920. On October 6, 1920 Yogananda presented his first speech in the United States, a philosophical address entitled "The Science of Religion," which was subsequently printed and widely distributed. Yogananda described God as interwoven within everyday experience, emphasized the universality of religious experience, and presented genuine religion as primarily God-consciousness or the realization of God within and without. The speaker stated that all individuals are countless reflected spiritual Selves of the universal blissful Spirit, God; in reality, God and humanity are one.[75] A person in Bliss-consciousness experiences an absence of pleasure-pain sensation a transcendental state of superior calm containing within an awareness of great expansion and a certainty of "all in One and One in all."[76] In Bliss-consciousness narrow individuality becomes transformed through expanded awareness:

> And we also feel an inward expansion and well-embracing sympathy for all things. The tumults of the world die away, excitements disappear, and the "all in One and One in all" consciousness seems to dawn upon us. A glorious vision of light appears. All imperfections, all angularities, sink into nothingness. 77

Yogananda wondered whether a Christian, a Hindu, and a Mohammedan should develop an interest in one another's prophets since all of them attained God-consciousness; the realization of God/Bliss unites the prophets of all religion.

In his speech the swami explained that the ever-blissful spiritual Self becomes liberated through intellectual, devotional, meditational, and scientific methods. He contended that intellectual perception cannot reveal the true nature of the one Universal Substance underlying divine manifestations. However intuition provides a immediate experience of Reality and reveals Reality completely:

> It is through intuition that humanity reaches Divinity, that the sensuous is brought into connection with the super-sensuous, and that the latter is felt to express itself in and through the sensuous. The influence of senses vanishes; intruding thoughts disappear; Bliss-God is realized; the consciousness of "all in One and One in all" dawns upon us. This intuition is what all great savants and prophets of the world possessed. 78

During the three following years, he remained in Boston, where the swami presented public lectures, taught classes, and wrote a book containing poems entitled Songs of the Soul.[79] Yogananda conducted transcontinental speaking engagements during 1924, established the Self Realization Fellowship in Los Angeles in 1925, and was received at the White House by President Calvin Coolidge in 1927. During the decade between 1920 and 1930, he lectured throughout the United States and conducted countless classes. When his friend Luther Burbank died in 1926, the swami conducted a Vedic memorial service.

Fifteen years after he started his visit, Yogananda sailed from New York aboard the Europa on June 9, 1935; the swami toured Germany, Holland, France, the Swiss Alps, Italy, Greece, the Holy Land, and Egypt before reaching Bombay on August 22, 1935.

Following his arrival, the former student visited Sri Yukteswar at Serampore. Yogananda's school at Ranchi, Yogoda Satsanga Brahmacharya Vidyalaya, became legally incorporated as a permanently endowed yoga educational institution. Branches were established as the Yogoda Satsanga Vidyapith at Lakhanpur in West Bengal and another institution at Ejmalichak in Midnapore in Bengal. In 1938 he founded the Yogoda Satsanga Society of India and dedicated his headquarters constructed as a stately ashram floating upon the Ganges at Dakshinewar.

The special friendship between Swami Yogananda and Sri Yukteswar endured. Following Sri Yukteswar's death, the deceased master appeared to Yogananda and imparted information describing the higher worlds and man's three bodies.[80] While visiting Mahatma Gandi, Yogananda heard him explain ahimsa as an absence of harm to any living creature. Extending his sympathies beyond the human species, the Mahatma explained how the cow symbolizes the entire sub-human world; through the cow, humanity becomes enjoined to realize an identity with every living creature; protecting the cow intimates protecting the entire inarticulate creation.[81] On August 27, 1935, Yogananda initiated Gandhi into Kriya yoga. The swami stated:

> All great prophets have remained silent when requested to unveil the ultimate secrets....
>
> Truth is no theory, no speculative system of philosophy, no intellectual insight. Truth is exact correspondence with reality. For man, truth is unskakable knowledge of his real nature, his Self as soul....
>
> The final mysteries of God are not "open to discussion." The decipherment of His secret code is an art that man cannot possibly communicate to man; here the Lord alone is the Teacher.
>
> "Be still, and know that I am God." 82

Sailing from Southampton for the United States in October, 1936, Yogananda

arrived in America and discovered that his followers had constructed a sea-side hermitage in Encinitas, California. Self Realization Fellowship monks and friends established a colony in Encinitas during 1937; a Church of All Religions in Hollywood, San Diego, and Long Beach; and a Mahatma Gandhi World Peace Memorial at the Lake Shrine in the Pacific Palisades section of Los Angeles in 1950. Swami Yogananda departed from his body in Los Angeles on March 7, 1952.

Conclusions

Studying new religious movements can extend human knowledge significantly. Although Miller and Shatzer encouraged and challenged communication scholars to establish intellectual foundations supporting a "world humanism,"[83] continuing research should be better defined. Specifically, sophisticated studies should analyze the "rhetorical synthesis" happening within "planetary culture" when Eastern mysticism meets Western science and rationalism.[84] Examining new religious movements requires developing an innovative interdisciplinary approach that addresses the essential philosophical questions concerning the nature of "truth" and "reality", how these phenomenona are pereceived or apprehended, and the function served by symbol-systems in experiencing, interpreting, and communicating.[85] Recognizing that today's interconnected and rapidly-moving world requires an attitude-change among persons, Kim encourages "intercultural personhood" that combines Eastern and Western cultural traditions that includes fundamental modes of consciousness, cognitive patterns, personal and social values, and communicative behavior.[86] Scholars should consider whether "religion" comprises a single universal phenomenon of which such manifestations or expressions as Hinduism and Christianity are simply representative; and whether describing "religion" from either an Eastern or a Western perspective prejudices the conceptualization. How do specific cultural contexts influence the communication

of religious "truth" or "reality"? Are the teachings within the seemingly different expressions of world religion communicated through the same or similar process, and is there a spiritual dimension in religious experience that remains incommunicable?

This study examining three Eastern swamis who assisted in inaugurating the new religions in America indicates that the teachings imparted by Vivekananda, Paramananda, and Yogananda comprise an ancient wisdom disseminated through Hinduism. Huxley's introduction to Prabhavanda and Isherwood's translation of the Hindu sacred scriptures Bhagavad-Gita enumerates four fundamental principles. These principles are that the phenomenal world is manifested of a Divine Ground of all that exists; that humans can realize this reality through direct intuition that is superior to discursive reasoning; that human nature contains a phenomenal ego and an eternal Self, and that the purpose of human existence is for persons to identify themselves with the spiritual Self and gain intuitive knowledge of the Divine Ground.[87] In The Perennial Philosophy, Huxley employed quotations from the sacred scriptures cherished by adherents embrasing different expressions of world religion; the principles presented by different faith-groups appear identical and indicate a single spiritual foundation undergirding world religion.[88]

Certainly the convergence of Eastern and Western religion constitutes an epoch-marking event. Although this confrontation should prompt thoughtful dialogue, Saliba criticizes Christian denominations for ignoring the new religious movements, admonishes evangelicals for their hostility, and encourages compassion.[89] Amirthan asserted that Christianity has never been prepared to encounter the challenges of religious pluralism;[90] and Coleman identifies neo-Orientalism as the major new challenge facing Christianity.[91] Conflict resolution and cultural synthesis requires effective intercultural communication and interreligious discussion.

Information infused into Western culture from Eastern sources prompts increasing insights through interdisciplinary analysis. Capra explored the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism as approaches for apprehending reality;[92] this author argued that environmental, economic, and political problems stem from a "crisis' of perception" arising from applying obsolete Cartesian concepts.[93] Mishlove maintained that psychic experiences, occult and mystical phenomena, and astral projection can be explained using new theories in physics.[94] In a fascinating juxtaposition of concepts garnered from mystics, physicists, and mediums, LaShane presented a unified field theory of the paranormal and advanced a theory for psychic healing.[95] Several writers indicate that this influx of information promotes integrating Western psychologies with Eastern religion;[96] and other authors attest that the confluence of Eastern and Western ideas evokes a greater understanding about human health, the spiritual dimension of well-being, and self-restorative processes through nutrition and meditation.[97] Studying these techniques extends human knowledge about the human potential and the nature of reality by suggesting that rolfing, biofeedback, and gestalt encounters are more than simplistic therapies.[98]

Studying the new religions assists persons in comprehending contemporary cultural conditions and in predicting the possibilities for future religious developments. Eister explained that "cults" appear as indicators of cultural crises such as the breakdown of traditional religion, disruptions of the standards of excellence, and loss of sources of meaning.[99] Pondering the possibility that the social structures casually determine religious beliefs, Westley predicted that complex societies will experience more highly differentiated religious forms.[100] And Wilson observed that the proliferation of new religious movements differs

from the growth of earlier movements in former generations because the speed of information transmission among contemporary cultures is extremely rapid and the possibilities for syncretism are greater.[101] Hence proliferating religious movements indicate a serious social collapse or cultural dislocation that has strong implications concerning the future prospects. Through rhetorical synthesis and dialectical enjoinment, through intercultural communication within which progressive perspectives develop, the new religions might evoke a syncretic religion or a discovery of a fundamental foundation within the varied expressions and manifestations of world religion. While Fox contends convincingly that denying mysticism represents a persistent intolerable scandal,[102] Smith compared and contrasted "the modern mind" and the "post-modern mind" predicting the prospects for progression beyond the modern Western mind-set.[103] Fox envisioned an emerging joyous, sensuous, eqalitarian, and ecological mysticism that is faithful to biblical imperatives and injunctions. Drawing creatively upon the Gaia hypothesis that describes the earth as a living organism, contemporary right brain/left brain research, and Jungian psychodynamics, Fox predicted a "paradigm shift" that will precipitate a global renaissance in human sexuality, intergenerational communication, alternative lifestyles, and religious worship and ecumenism.

Endnotes

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